

WELSH LANGUAGE AND FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

Welsh Welcome:

Prynhawn da pob un

Sut mae y prynhawn yma

Ydych 'n hynafiad o Cymru?

Ydym ni, Rhdym ni 'n hynafiad o Gymru

Ydych 'n barod am ddosbarth yr iaith?

Ydym ni!

Ardderchog! Gadewch 'ni yn ddechrau.

Good afternoon everyone

How are you this afternoon

Do you have ancestors from Wales?

Yes, we have ancestors from Wales.

Are you ready for the language class?

We are!

Wonderful! Let's begin.

Introduction

One of the peculiarities of research in Wales is the language. Invariably, anyone who does Welsh research will, at one time or another, encounter difficulty with the language. Problems, ranging from place name interpretations to reading old family letters written in Welsh, can become stumbling blocks in research. There is no easy way of getting around the language barrier. Learning Welsh is particularly difficult because it is so different from English, and there are so few places that actually offer a course in the language. Even to the most persistent student, intent on learning something about it, the obstacles can seem almost impossible to surmount.

This is not intended to be a language course. Its purpose is to discuss only the most basic rudiments of the language and to show how they can be applied to genealogical research. We will discuss the **Welsh alphabet** and show how it is different from the English alphabet. The **sound** each letter forms will be discussed along with some brief explanations regarding **mutations**. Finally, it will give some useful pointers on how to use a Welsh dictionary.

The Welsh Alphabet:

The five columns below compare and contrast the English and Welsh alphabets. Six letters of the English alphabet are not part of the Welsh. And Welsh has eight letters which are not part of the English alphabet. Note that each of the eight letters in the “Welsh Only” column **appears** to consist of two letters. But in Welsh the **two** letters in each case are viewed as being only **one**.

<u>COMPLETE ENGLISH</u>	<u>ENGLISH ONLY</u>	<u>COMMON TO ENGLISH & WELSH</u>	<u>WELSH ONLY</u>	<u>COMPLETE WELSH</u>
a		a		a
b		b		b
c		c		c
d		d	ch	ch
e		e		d
f		f	dd	dd
g		g		e
h		h		f
i		i	ff	ff
j	j			g
k	k		ng	ng
l		l		h
m	m			i
n		n		l
o		o	ll	ll
p		p		m
q	q			n
r		r		o
s		s		p
t		t	ph	ph
u		u		r
v	v		rh	rh
w		w		s
x	x			t
y		y	th	th
z	z			u
				w
				y

Pronunciation

“dd”: The sounds produced by certain letters in the Welsh alphabet are misinterpreted and spelled incorrectly most of the time. For example, the sound of the double d (dd) is nearly always mispronounced. Pontypridd is the market town at the head of the Rhondda valleys. By those not familiar with the language, it is usually pronounced as pontypridu with the English sounding d. It really should be pronounced Pontypridd with pridd sounding just like the word breathe, except with a p rather than a b sound. The dd forms the soft th sound.

“ll”: There are several letters in the Welsh alphabet that produce their own sound and have no equivalent sound in English. The **double “ll”** sound is an example. The sound of this letter is not formed in the throat. It is formed by placing the tongue at the roof of the mouth and blowing air sharply out the side. In essence, there is no sound produced in pronouncing this letter, except the blowing sound. The sound comes from using it in conjunction with other letters. Once this is understood, it helps you decipher some very unusual written renditions of this letter; like, Slanvihangel, (Llanfihangel), Thlangthovery (Llanddover), and other even more bizarre spellings of the Welsh letter "ll".

Listed below are the letters of the Welsh alphabet. Next to the letter is an explanation of the sound it emits. This pronunciation key should help give one a clearer understanding of how to interpret badly spelled Welsh place names.

<u>Welsh Letter</u>	<u>Pronunciation</u>
a	ah as in father
b	b
c	k
ch	sounds like Scottish loch as in Loch Lomond
d	d
dd	soft th as in breathe
e	a sound as in breath
f	v
ff	as in the English F
g	hard g sound as in get
ng	sound as in linger or longer
h	h
i	Long e sound as in meet
l	l
ll	blowing sound not formed in the throat as other vowels and syllables.
m	m
n	n
o	Long o sound
p	p
ph	f sound
r	trilled r

rh	no equivalent in English but could compare it to the rh in perhaps when the r and h are run together as one
t	t
th	hard th sound as in wreath
u	Long e sound
w	oo as in broom
y	uh sound
	Long e sound

“Kevenvise”: Knowing how letters of the Welsh alphabet sound can help you make sense out of words that have been grossly misspelled. For instance, if you saw the word **Kevenvise**, you would immediately know that it had been written incorrectly. There is no k in the Welsh alphabet. Only one letter has the K sound and that is the Welsh C. Next, you would recognize that there is no V in the Welsh alphabet either. Only the Welsh single f has the v sound. So this corrupted word now appears as Cefenfise. This is still not completely correct since few words end in ise. This English rendition would probably be aes in Welsh. Our corrupted word, Kevenvise, really turns out to be Cefnfaes, which means a plateau. When this word is pronounced, it sounds just like it is written in its corrupted form.

Mutations

Presented below are the nine initial consonants which are often mutated in Welsh and their mutation patterns. See the page entitled “Using a Welsh Dictionary” for a list of letters which may begin a word after the mutation has occurred and the possible original consonants.

Mutations are common to Welsh as well as several other Celtic Languages. The main purpose of this brief discussion is to acquaint you with what a mutation is and how to recognize a word when it has been mutated. They are sound changes that occur in certain initial consonants of a word. In the Welsh alphabet three kinds of mutations (soft, nasal and aspirate) affect nine consonants. Become familiar with them. You will encounter them in your research.

As you will see from the following table, some words can be rendered almost incomprehensible, unless the principle of mutations is understood. You cannot find a word in its mutated form in a dictionary. You must determine what the initial consonant is before it can be found in the dictionary (See further explanation in the next section "Using the Welsh Dictionary").

TABLE OF MUTATIONS

<i>Initial Consonant</i>	<i>Soft</i>	<i>Nasal</i>	<i>Aspirate</i>
P pensil (pencil)	B ei bensil e (his pencil)	MH fy mhensil I (my pencil)	PH ei phensil hi (her pencil)
T tad (father)	D ei dad e (his father)	NH fy nhad I (my father)	TH ei thad hi (her father)
C ci (dog)	G ei gi e (his dog)	NGH fh nghi I (my dog)	CH ei chi i (her dog)
B brawd (brother)	F ei frawd e (his brother)	M fy mrawd I (my brother)	NO CHANGE
D dosbarth (class)	DD ei ddosbarth e (his class)	N fy nosbarth I (my class)	NO CHANGE
G gardd (garden)	– ei ardd e (his garden)	NG fy ngardd I (my garden)	NO CHANGE
LL llyfr (book)	L ei lyfr e (his book)	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE
M mam (mother)	F ei fam e (his mother)	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE
RH rhaglen (program)	R ei raglen e (his program)	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE

USING A WELSH DICTIONARY

Because initial consonants are often mutated in Welsh, the word as it appears in your text may begin with a “mutated” letter different from its “original” letter. Use the following list in your search:

IF THE WORD BEGINS WITH	A LOOK UNDER	G (See note 1 below)
B		P
CH		C
D		T
DD		D
E		G
F		B and M
G		C
H		All vowels (see note 2)
I		G
L		G and LL
M		B
MH		P
N		N and G
NG		G
NGH		C
NH		T
O		G
PH		P
R		G and RH
TH		T
W		G
Y		G

Note 1: The initial consonant “G” can mutate to “NG” or it can simply disappear.

Note 2: “H” is sometimes added to a word normally beginning with a vowel. If you fail to find a word beginning with “H” under the “H’s” in the dictionary, continue your search under the vowel which follows the “H”. Don’t forget the “W” and “Y” are also vowels in Welsh.

The DOUBLE LETTERS. It is often difficult for Welsh learners to view the so-called "double letters" as units. Dictionary problems are frequently the result. Here are some examples to help you remember to give special treatment to the WELSH ONLY letters.

IN THE WELSH DICTIONARY

dichell (trick)	WILL FOLLOW	dicter (anger)
god <u>d</u> ef (to bear)	WILL FOLLOW	god <u>r</u> o (to milk)

dyffryn (valley)	WILL FOLLOW	dyfynnu (to quote)
gwylt (mad)	WILL FOLLOW	gwylan (seagull)
rhad (free)	WILL FOLLOW	ruban (ribbon)
athro (teacher)	WILL FOLLOW	atynnu (to attract)

BUT it is extremely important to bear in mind that

"ng" immediately follows "g" in the Welsh alphabet.

SO when looking for "cangen", do not locate "c-a-ng" and then look for the "g-e-n".

GO FIRST to "c-a-g" and then look for "c-a-ng".

III. REASONS WHY YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO FIND YOUR WORD IN A WELSH DICTIONARY:

- Your dictionary may be too small.
- Your word may be the conjugated form of a verb. Dod (to come) is listed in the dictionary, but daeth (he came) is not.
- Your word may be the conjugated form of a preposition. Am (about) is listed, but amdani (about her) is not.
- Your word may be the comparative or superlative form of an adjective. Hen (old) is listed, but henach (older) and hena (oldest) are not.
- Your word may be a contraction. I (to) and ei (his) are both listed, but their contracted form i'w is not.

IV. REASONS WHY THE WORD YOU FIND IN THE DICTIONARY MAY NOT MAKE SENSE:

- It may be part of a two-word preposition. Ol is a noun meaning "track" but when combined with ar to form ar ol, the result is a preposition meaning "after."
- It may be part of an idiomatic expression. Hen by itself means "old" takes on different meaning in the expression hen bryd, which means "high time."

PERSONAL PRONOUNS AND THE VERB TO BE - **BOD**

- I, he, she, we, you, they
- There is no **it** – either masculine or feminine

Yr wyf I	I am	yr ydym ni	we are
Y mae ef	he is	yr ydym chwi	you are
Y mae hi	she is	y maent hwy	they are

ORDER OF SENTENCES

1. Subject of sentence usually placed after the verb
2. Order of words: 1) verb 2) subject 3) object 4) rest of sentence

PRESENT PARTICIPLE (*yn* placed before the verb forms present participle)

- | | | | |
|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| 1. Darllen | to read | yn darllen | reading |
| 2. Eistedd | to sit | yn eistedd | sitting |
| 3. Sefyll | to stand | yn sefyll | standing |
| 4. Gweithio | to work | yn gweithio | working |
| 5. Chwarae | to play | yn chwarae | playing |
| 6. Dysgu | to learn | yn dysgu | learning |
| 7. Hoffi | to like | yn hoffi | liking |

The Welsh Language and Interpreting Place Names.

Example: *David Rees of Aberdare and Capel Dewi, Carmarthenshire*

Another example is **David Rees**, who was found in the 1851 census with this name and gave his birthplace as Carmarthen. Another source gave his birth place as Capel Dewi, Carmarthenshire. His age in the census indicated that he was born around 1820-1821. He also went by the name David Rees Davies on occasion. There was a Capel Dewi in the parish of Llanarthney, Carmarthenshire. A David was christened in this parish in April of 1821, whose parents were John and Mary Davies of Cappel Dewy Canol. After more research, this proved to be the right David Rees. It appears he adopted the name of his **mother's father**, who was named Rees.

Example: *John Walter and Rachel: White Mill, Llandebie, Carmarthenshire*

John Walter married a Rachel in 1812, and had children. She died, and he married a Rachel Pierce in 1818, and had children. **Felinwen** and **White Mill**.

Example: *Clement family of Great Mountain, Llannon Parish, Carmarthenshire*

Blaen y Waen, Baptist Chapel, St. Dogmael Parish, Pembrokeshire

Original entry:

Enw'r aelodau a chyfrif
am ei gyfraniadau at y
Weinidogaeth yn flynyddol

Translation:

The names of members and an
account of their annual
contributions to the ministry

David Moris	Cwm degwell
Elenor Moris	el <u>wraig</u> (gwraig)
Mary Moris	ei <u>ferch</u> (merch)
Elenor Moris	ei <u>ferch</u> (merch)
Margt Moris	ei <u>ferch</u> (merch)

David Moris	Cwmdegwell
Elenor Moris	his wife
Mary Moris	his daughter
Elenor Moris	his daughter
Margt Moris	his daughter

Mutated words:

1. chyfrif = cyfrif
2. gyfraniadau = cyfraniadau
3. weinidogaeth = gweinidogaeth
4. flynyddol = blynyddol

Monumental inscription for Catherine Thomas of Eglwysfach Paris Denbighshire:

Here lyeth the body of Thomas Jones, of Waun Vechen, who was buried the 4th day of March 1730 aged 44. Dyma lle mae yn gorwedd corff John Roberts, Fo y gladdwyd yn yr 19 dydd o fis Tachwedd yn y flwyddyn 1744 ei oed 73. Dyma lle mae yn gorwedd corff Mary Jones, Hi a gladdwyd yr 16 o fis Awst yn yr flwyddyn 1745 ei hoedran 72. Dyma lle mae'n gorwedd corff cathrin Roberts, hi a gladdwyd yr 16 of fis Awst yn yr flwyddyn 1776 I hoedran 6. Also Owen Roberts, of Bodnant was buried the 11th October 1815 aged 71. Catherine Thomas, his wife was buried 7 November, 1820 age 78.

Translation:

Here lyeth the bod
y of Thomas Jones of Waun Vechen, who was buried the 4th day of March 1730 aged 44.
Here lieth the body of John Roberts, who was buried the 19th day of November 1744 aged 73. Here lieth the body of Mary Jones, She was buried the 16th day of August, 1745 aged 72. Here lieth the body of Cathrin Roberts, she was buried 16th of August in the year 1776 aged 6 years (This is Owen Roberts and Catherine Thomas' eldest child who was christened in September, 1769. She is buried on the 16th under the name of Cathrin Owen, not Roberts), also, Owen Roberts, of Bodnant was buried the 11th October, 1815 aged 71. Catherine Thomas, his wife, was buried 7 November 1820, aged 78.

Using Welsh dictionary to find place names (mutations, written incorrectly)

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| a. Yn Pentre | yn Mhentre |
| b. White Mill | Melin gwen (mutated form: Felin wen) |
| c. Yn Cymru | yng Nghymru |
| d. Cymraeg | Gymraeg |
| e. Lledrod | yn Ledrod |
| f. Bwlchgwynt | Fwlchgwynt |
| g. Gwnnws | Wnnws |
| h. Yn Tal-y-bont | yn Nhal-y-bont |
| i. Y Pont | y Bont |
| j. St. Nicholas | Tremarchog (Welsh name for St. Nicholas) |
| k. Church Town | Trefeglwys (Welsh name for church town) |
| l. Tir yn y gors | Tir cwm y gors, Y gors Visach (Fisach), various misspellings |